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ABSTRACT

Racial attitudes were an issue in the 1972 Mississippi gubernatorial campaign between Charles Evers and William Waller. This conclusion is supported by test evidence consisting of content analysis of candidate speeches, news coverage of speeches in the form of direct quotations, printed issue position papers, and printed campaign advertising. A biracial group of college students was tested for connotations and denotations within sample prose works to form control data from which contrasts to Evers' and Waller's writings were drawn. Evers' rhetoric did not ignore this racial element found in the campaign; Waller's did. (CH)

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The Race Issue In Mississippi Politics

A Content Analysis of Campaign Discourse in Mississippi's 1971 Gubernatorial Campaign

by

Emma Lou King

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INTRODUCTION

A century ago black men first entered high level politics in Mississippi. Racial polarization as a psychological force climaxed with the Civil War[1], and reconstruction politics made blacks active in all phases of government in Mississippi[2]. Temporary, army-enforced black political supremacy ended as whites regained their political strength and not until a century later did the first post-reconstruction black man face a white favorite-son as a candidate for governor.

The gubernatorial campaign decided on November 2, 1971, was an historical climax for Mississippi politics. Charles Evers had already made history as the only black mayor of a bi-racial town in Mississippi. Public interest in the campaign was intensified by a previous relationship between Evers and his opponent, Bill Waller. Waller, as prosecuting attorney for Hinds County, twice tried unsuccessfully to convict Byron de la Beckwith of the 1963 sniper slaying of Evers' brother, Medgar.

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[1]Forrest G. Wood, Black Scare, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970, Preface.

[2]Vernon Lane Wharton, The Negro In Mississippi 1865-1890, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947, pp. 275-276.

The campaign attracted much attention. National and regional opinions often clashed. Some observers thought that race, a success plank for several generations of Mississippi candidates, was dead as a political issue. Some disagreed. Speculation over the effect of racial issues in the campaign continued from August through November and was the subject of much conversation after the election.

In order to make an objective judgement about the incidence of racial issues in the campaign, this study attempts to determine whether there was evidence of the race issue in either candidate's campaign discourse and whether there were racial differences in the campaign discourse as perceived by black and white Mississippians.

PRIMARY SOURCES

The campaign literature examined in this study is limited by the difficulties encountered in the search for speech manuscripts. Charles Evers always gave his speeches without notes[3] or manuscripts, and no radio stations in the state kept tapes of either candidate's speeches. The data analyzed does include one Evers speech made in Tylertown, Mississippi[4] and taped

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[3]Thomas Powers, "Letter From a Lost Campaign", Harper's, March, 1972, p. 22.

[4]Charles Evers, speech delivered at Tylertown, Mississippi, February 2, 1971. From a tape made by WTYL, Tylertown, Mississippi.

interviews with Bill Waller which were prepared for radio broadcast[5].

Reports of candidate speeches in local newspapers[6] provided partial speech texts through the combinations of direct quotations.

Additional sources of the campaign discourse include the printed literature distributed by the candidates. Both candidates provided the public with position papers on the issues of the campaign. Handbill and newspaper advertising prose were included.

The campaign literature fell into four natural divisions: Division I-speeches, interviews, and letters directly addressed to the public; Division II - news coverage of speeches in the form of direct quotations; Division III - printed issue positions; and Division IV - printed campaign advertising and handouts.

In addition to the campaign literature of Waller and Evers, this research examines additional sources used as control literature. The racial content dictionary tests were also run on a speech by George C. Wallace[7], a speech by Adam Clayton

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[5]Bill Waller, radio interviews for public broadcast from WRPM, Poplarville, Mississippi, August 22-November 2, 1971.

[6]Mississippi daily newspapers were examined for the time period August 1 through November 2, 1971.

[7]George C. Wallace, "The Civil Rights Bill: Fraud Sham, and Hoax", in Voices of Crises, ed. by Floyd W. Matson (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1967), pp. 178-193.

Powell[8], and chapters one and eight of a fiction work by John Knowles[9].

CONTENT ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

In order to test the gubernatorial campaign for racial issues, content dictionaries were devised in the following manner.

Eight white and eight black students enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi read and coded prose selections from (1) the candidates, Bill Waller and Charles Evers, (2) black revolutionist, H. Rap Brown[10], (3) white racist speeches from the Ku Klux Klan[11], and (4) some neutral control literature from Samuel L. Clemens[12].

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[8]Adam Clayton Powell, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?", in Rhetoric of Black Revolution, by Arthur Smith (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1969).

[9]John Knowles, A Separate Peace (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1959) pp. 1-12, pp. 89-107.

[10]H. Rap Brown, Die Nigger Die! (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1969) pp. 1-11.

[11]Donald E. Williams, "Protest Under the Cross: The Ku Klux Klan Presents Its Case to the Public, 1960" in The Rhetoric Of Our Times by J. Jeffery Auer (New York: Merideth Corporation, 1969) pp. 415-427.

[12]Samuel L. Clemens, "New England Weather", "The Babies" in The World's Great Sppeches by Lewis Copland (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Ind., 1942) pp. 666-670.

In order to have a large volume of literature coded for the content dictionaries, the total volume included four sets. Each set contained two samples of literature from each of the above sources. Two blacks and two whites coded each set.

Each coder received three copies of one set of dictionary literature. Each copy had different instructions on the first page. The coders were asked to read and code the selections for the particular issue defined on that copy.

Coders were instructed to mark all words and phrases with connotations or denotations of the defined issue. The study excluded the sets marked for issues of education and poverty and used only the sets marked for racial issues.

Two listings - black and white - included all words and phrases marked by the coders. All words and phrases marked by both Blacks and Whites were combined into the General dictionary and divided into seven categories of racial discourse. These categories were defined to be mutually inclusive.

Black and white indicators in this study are words and phrases marked exclusively by Blacks or exclusively by Whites. These indicators, both black and white, fell into only four of the seven General dictionary categories.

The Black dictionary used for analysis consists of the General dictionary plus the Black indicators. The White dictionary consists of the General dictionary plus the White

indicators.

The result of this division of coded listings was three dictionaries: (1) The General Dictionary included all words and phrases perceived as racial by both blacks and whites. (2) The Black dictionary included all words and phrases perceived as racial by black Mississippians. (3) The White dictionary included all words and phrases perceived as racial by white Mississippians.

The frequencies with which the dictionary categories and indicators occurred in the campaign and control literature were carefully tabulated and comparatively analyzed. Significance was determined by Chi Square tests.

CONCLUSIONS

Twenty-two tables of frequency counts were composed to answer the questions of this study. These tables compared Waller and Evers to each other and to each of three control samples: George C. Wallace, Adam Clayton Powell, and John Knowles.

Tabulated frequencies showed that race was evident in the campaign and that there was more racial content in Evers' campaign than Waller's campaign. In all the dictionary applications, the difference in Waller and Evers was significant. Analysis with the General dictionary yielded a total frequency

count of fifty for Waller compared to 283 for Evers. The majority of this racial content was found in the campaign speeches and interviews.

When comparing Waller and Evers to two political and one nonpolitical source, the frequencies of racial category usages were not due to chance occurence. Both of the political speeches registered racial content frequencies. Category frequencies in Waller's material were significantly less frequent than the political speeches. Category frequencies for Evers were significantly higher. The moderate prose of Waller and the more extreme position taken by Evers on racial issues in the campaign were evident. The nonpolitical source possessed no racial content.

Comparisons of Waller and Evers frequencies in all content categories showed a significant difference with Evers using more racial content in his campaign.

Waller used more racial material in the categories of Education, Black Liberation, and Unity of Races. The frequency increases in the Education category are largely from Waller's stand on busing to achieve racial integration.

The frequencies were high for Evers in all categories. Evers constantly distinguished the races to whom he was referring by his use of the adjectives black and white. Other

high frequencies were recorded in the categories of Black Liberation and Names and Stereotypes.

These high frequencies for Evers and low frequencies for Waller resulted in unusually high significance levels for many of the analysis comparisons.

In comparisons of the Black and White dictionaries for each candidate, there would appear to be some difference in black and white perceptions of racial issues. Separate black and white indicators were marked by coders during the dictionary procedures. When applied to the campaign, both black and white indicators were registered.

In comparing these exclusively black or white dictionary units to the General dictionary some significant differences were noted. The significance for Evers was found in the General to White dictionary comparisons. The significance for Waller was found in the General to Black dictionary comparisons. This could be due to the application of predispositions during dictionary coding procedures.

To say that the perceptions of Blacks and Whites were directed at the opposite race is not warranted from this investigation. Much more research would be necessary before such assumptions could be made.

Racial issues seem to be perceived differently by Blacks

and Whites, and indications are that this difference in perception was present to some degree in the Waller-Evers gubernatorial campaign.

SUMMARY EVALUATION

Charles Evers was responding to a defined audience in his gubernatorial campaign. He spoke to poor blacks and poor whites and he spoke as they expected him to speak. Evers was not competing against Bill Waller. Evers was competing against racism in Mississippi. The only way Evers knew to fight racism in Mississippi was in the open; therefore, Evers spoke about racial issues.

Bill Waller was not competing against Charles Evers. Waller in many ways was also competing against racism. His technique was moderate avoidance. He stayed away from as many racial issues as possible. But the issues didn't go away.

Race was an issue in the 1972 Mississippi gubernatorial campaign.

TABLE 1

GENERAL DICTIONARY

	Division I[a]		Division II[b]		Division III[c]		Division IV[d]	
	Waller	Evers	Waller	Evers	Waller	Evers	Waller	Evers
Names & Stereotypes								
Black	1	22	. .	1	. .	. .	. .	. .
White	. .	24	. .	2	. .	. .	. .	. .
Color Distinctions								
Black	3	48	2	5	. .	15	. .	1
White	. .	44	. .	1	. .	4	. .	. .
Education	13	9	5	. .	4	9	1	. .
Black Oppression	. .	17	. .	7	. .	4	. .	. .
Black Liberation	1	17	. .	2	. .	1	. .	. .
Unity of Races	8	22	1	8	. .	. .	. .	. .
Racism	5	11	5	6	1	8	. .	. .
Totals	31	214	13	32	5	41	1	1

Waller Total: 50 Evers Total: 288

[a]Speeches, interviews, letters directly addressed to the public.

[b]News coverage of speeches - direct quotations.

[c]Printed issue positions.

[d]Printed campaign advertising and handouts.

TABLE 2

WHITE DICTIONARY

	Division I[a]		Division II[b]		Division III[c]		Division IV[d]	
	Waller	Evers	Waller	Evers	Waller	Evers	Waller	Evers
Names & Stereotypes								
Black	5	47	. .	8	. .	1	. .	. .
White	. .	24	1	3	. .	. .	. .	. .
Color Distinction								
Black	3	48	2	5	. .	15	. .	1
White	. .	44	. .	1	. .	4	. .	. .
Education	23	15	8	1	4	9	1	. .
Black Oppression	. .	17	. .	7	. .	4	. .	. .
Black Liberation	8	40	. .	6	. .	1	1	. .
Unity of Races	16	22	4	8	. .	. .	1	4
Racism	5	11	5	6	1	8	. .	. .
Totals	60	272	20	45	5	42	3	5

Waller Total: 88 Evers Total: 364

NOTE: Evers campaign material contained more racially-perceived data than did Waller campaign material. Most of the racial content was recorded in Division I - speeches.

[a]Speeches, interviews, and letters directly addressed to the public.

[b]News coverage of speeches - direct quotations.

[c]Printed issue positions.

[d]Printed campaign advertising and handouts.

TABLE 3

BLACK DICTIONARY

	Division I[a]		Division II[b]		Division III[c]		Division IV[d]	
	Waller	Evers	Waller	Evers	Waller	Evers	Waller	Evers
Names & Stereotypes								
Black	1	32	. .	3	2	. .	. .	. .
White	. .	25	. .	2	. .	1	. .	. .
Color Distinctions								
Black	3	48	2	55	. .	15	. .	1
White	. .	44	. .	1	. .	4	. .	. .
Education	13	9	5	. .	11	9	1	. .
Black Oppression	. .	17	. .	7	. .	4	. .	. .
Black Liberation	15	33	. .	4	1	1	2	. .
Unity of Races	8	11	5	6	1	8	. .	. .
Totals:	40	219	12	28	18	42	3	1

Waller Totals: 73 Evers Totals: 290

NOTE: Evers campaign material contained more racially-perceived data than did Waller campaign material. Most of the racial content was recorded in Division I - speeches.

[a]Speeches, interviews, and letters directly addressed to the public.

[b]News coverage of speeches - direct quotations.

[c]Printed issue positions.

[d]Printed campaign advertising and handouts.

TABLE 4

WALLER TOTALS IN ALL THREE DICTIONARIES

	General Dictionary	Black Dictionary	White Dictionary
Names & Stereotypes			
Black	1	3	5
White	. .	. .	1
Color Distinctions			
Black	5	5	5
White	. .	. .	. .
Education	23	30	36
Black Oppression	. .	. .	. .
Black Liberation	1	21	9
Unity of Racism	9	13	21
Racism	11	11	11
Totals:	50	83	88

NOTE: Waller recorded his highest counts of racially perceived terms in the white dictionary. The significant differences, however, were recorded in the black dictionary. The highest category counts of racially perceived terms were in Education, Black Liberation, and Unity of Races.

TABLE 5

EVERS TOTALS IN DICTIONARIES

	General Dictionary	Black Dictionary	White Dictionary
Names & Stereotypes			
Black	23	35	56
White	26	28	27
Color Distinctions			
Black	69	69	69
White	49	49	49
Education	18	18	29
Black Oppression	28	28	28
Black Liberation	20	38	47
Unity of Races	30	31	34
Racism	25	25	25
Totals	288	321	364

NOTE: Evers recorded his highest counts of racially perceived terms in the white dictionary. With the exception of Color Distinction, Black Oppression, and Racism, each dictionary gave different category frequencies. Each category registered racially perceived terms in each dictionary.

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